

ART. III.—*Anthropology in Australia*.*

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For the first time in Australia the study of Anthropology has taken up a definite position, by the formation of Section E of the Royal Society of Victoria. It seems remarkable that the science of man should have been the last to have attracted special attention here, where there are unrivalled opportunities for its presentation in a country where man still exists in as nearly a primitive condition as it is possible to find in any part of the world.

It is certainly true, that since the time when the white man took up his abode in Australia, there have always been more or less numerous enquiries into native customs, commencing with Collins, who compiled his work called "An Account of New South Wales" in the early years of settlement. Since then, until now, there has been a constant succession of observers who, as explorers, settlers, and missionaries, have devoted more or less time and attention to enquiring into and recording the customs and the beliefs of the Aborigines who wandered over the Australian land. These works, and numerous detached accounts which are scattered through, and I may say buried in, the transactions of societies here and elsewhere, form a literature of considerable extent, and of very varied degrees of authority and value. In the great majority of these works, even in some of the most recent, which profess to be written with authority, it is dangerous for any one to accept the statements made without such knowledge on the part of the reader as will enable him to form an independent opinion.

The time has now come for this great mass of material to be digested, and for those portions which are of value to be extracted, circulated, and placed in such form that it may be possible to make some generalisation. I have long proposed to myself to attempt this in connection with a work on the

* An Introductory Address, read before Section E.

organisation and the customs and beliefs of Australian tribes, for which I have been engaged in collecting material for many years, both personally and through correspondents in the greater parts of Australia. These materials remain still in a great measure unused, but I am at present unable to form any opinion as to when the time may come in which the pressure of official duties will permit of my devoting the necessary leisure, not only to the condensation and arrangement of my own data, but also to the condition of the great mass of material in other works to which I have referred.

In this address I do not propose to enter upon any general review of the science of Anthropology in its Australian aspect, but to confine myself to tracing out briefly the progress and present position of that part to which my own special attention has been devoted—namely, the probable origin and development of social institutions. In this study, the origin and development of the family forms an essential element.

In investigations such as these, the white man who has been born and bred and trained in the ways of civilisation is at a disadvantage, unless he has had such intimate intercourse with savages as to enable him to place himself more or less in their mental standpoints, to see as they see, and to reason as they reason. Few white men have been in that position, and yet fewer of those have been competent to avail themselves of their opportunities.

Buckley and Morell, who will serve for examples, lived for years with Australian tribes, and they show how white men under such circumstances may not only descend nearly to the level of the savage, but after again rejoining their own people, are unable to give even as clear an account of the Aboriginal society, of which they formed a part, as an average blackfellow. So far as one can ascertain, they appear to have been quite ignorant of even the rules which govern the intermarrying classes of the community. Even educated men, with more or less scientific training, do not, as it would seem, always see matters which must have been directly within their view. I was struck by this when reading a late and interesting work by the naturalist Lumbolz, on the "Aborigines of the Herbert River in Eastern Queensland." I observed that even he, after some four years of more or less intimate acquaintance with those people, does not seem to have seen much below the surface. He makes no mention of the laws governing their society, as regards marriage, nor does he seem to have seen or to have had des-

cribed to him the secret ceremonies of initiation to manhood, which must certainly exist, and which are most important as furnishing a key to many otherwise puzzling customs.

This, then, being generally the case with those who have personally observed these savages, what can be expected from those who have taken up the observations of others for the purpose of generalisation as to the origin of social institutions in the Australian tribes, or generally throughout the world. This becomes clearly evident when one considers the conclusions reached as to the origin of the family by Bachofen, McLennan, Mayne, and Morgan, who may be here taken as representing four well marked and progressive stages of opinion.

Bachofen, working altogether from a classical standpoint, elaborated a strange and somewhat grotesque hypothesis of a former universal gynecocracy. He held that of old mankind was found in a condition of universal betarism, from which it was raised by the establishment of gynecocracy by women, as a continuous protest against the degradation to which man's superior physical powers had reduced her. It is evident that he saw, dull and distorted, as through a glass darkly, the traces of the Matriarchal system which was once universal, and which still exists among certain savage tribes.

McLennan, advancing a step further, built his theory on a wider foundation of classically extinct and modern existing custom, and saw, as he believed, the origin of the family in polyandry, which was brought about by a scarcity of women, produced by female infanticide. The actual existence of polyandry as a form of the family, the numbers of facts marshalled by him with consummate ability, both from ancient and modern sources, caused his theory to be widely accepted, and to have an authority which is still recognised by a section of anthropologists.

Mayne was led to form certain views by his investigation into the true character of early institutions as handed down to us by the archaic records of our own Aryan ancestors, illustrated by the existing customs of some of their descendants. He compared his results with the ancient records of Semitic peoples, and he arrived at the conclusion that the primitive form of the family was that known as the Patriarchal, in which the power of the father was predominant, and which was characterised more or less by polygamy.

Morgan had his attention drawn to these questions by his personal observations of the organisation of the Iroquois tribe, of which he was an adopted member. Following out the clue hereby gained, he spread his inquiries over the greater part of the world, and his final results were recorded in his work on "Ancient Society." His views combine, in a great measure, the essential portions of the other hypotheses, and comprise a primitive community with promiscuity, the prevalence of a communal family, within which descent was connected through the mother, and a gradual development therefrom of social institutions through polygamy to monogamy, as we now see it in civilized peoples.

Nearly twenty years back our valued fellow member, the Rev. Lorimer Fison, took up in Australia the work commenced elsewhere by Dr. Morgan, and it was my privilege to join him somewhat later.

In Australia, if anywhere, one might expect to find primitive institutions preserved. The aborigines are in a low ethnic stage. They have been preserved until the settlement of their country by the white man through unknown periods almost wholly from contact with other races in a different stage of culture. Therefore, one might seek with good chances of success among them for, at the least, traces of the earlier form of the family and of society. One might further anticipate that evidence should be obtainable to show either a process of development of or degradation of the social status.

During the last fifteen years, Mr. Fison and myself have been diligently pursuing this line of inquiry against no ordinary difficulties, and with the result that our general conclusions have been received by leading anthropologists with favour. The results of our investigations, so far as regards the questions to which I have now directed attention, are as follows:—

(1) The social organisation of all the Australian tribes is based on the same general principles, with local and individual variations.

(2) The most primitive form of the family is a communal one, as evidenced by the existence in Central Australian tribes of that which we have called the Pirauru practice, under which a number of men, own or tribal brothers, cohabit in common with a number of women who are own or tribal sisters.

(3) Co-existent with the Pirauru practice in these tribes, there is also individual marriage, based upon infant betrothal, or exchange of women. In other tribes individual marriage predominates, with merely traces of group marriage.

(4) Society is organised upon the division of the community into two exogamous intermarrying groups.

(5) This division into two intermarrying groups, each of which is represented in a somewhat modified form by the Pirauru groups, brings into view a set of relationships which are those of group to group, and not those of individual to individual. But the individual takes the relationship of his group.

(6) The relationship terms in use are fundamentally such as would be required by such communal groups, but differ in different tribes in their departure from the primitive type. This departure is in the direction of a differentiation from general into special individual terms.

The general results of these enquiries are, that the earliest social organisation of the ancestors of the Australian aborigines was probably that of an undivided commune, or in other words, of the condition of promiscuity which has been postulated by some authors; the succeeding state was that of a divided commune, with promiscuity limited to each commune, and this still exists here. The Pirauru practice affords, in fact, an explanation of the existing system of polyandry in Thibet, and among the Nairs, on which Mr. McLennan's theory of the early state of society rests. He was, therefore, so far correct in assuming polyandry to have been an early social stage, but it was not as we now see, merely polyandry, but polyandry combined with polygyny—in other words regulated promiscuity, such as is now found existing in many of the Australian tribes.

The results thus attained have been reached by a series of stages, in each of which a certain advance was made upon previous hypotheses. This is indeed just that which one may observe in any of the sciences. Step by step data are accumulated as the horizon widens, and each advance establishes some part of the previous hypotheses, while it sweeps away those portions which have been based upon insufficient data.

Our present knowledge of the organisation of Australian tribes stands as I have sketched it. That this knowledge is still incomplete in many important details I readily admit,

but I must maintain that the general features have been sketched out in broad and sufficiently accurate lines, which will not be materially altered by further investigations. Details will be filled in and variations from the typical structure will be observed and recorded. It may be that some even more archaic form of aboriginal society will be discovered in tribes isolated in the desert parts of the western half of the continent. But I am satisfied it will be found that all information will fall into an orderly sequence of development from an undivided commune, with maternal descent, to a community in which individual marriage is completely established, together with a change of descent to the male life.

Such being the case, I may observe further, that in the varied series of social communities existing in Australian tribes, we may safely mark the gradual development of early society, which through savagery had led up, through the status of barbarism, to the present position of civilized man.

The work which still remains to be done in Australian Anthropology is immense, and includes investigations as to the racial affinities of our aborigines, including peculiarities or divergences of physical structure. Also whether, excluding the influence of other races on the northern coasts, there are or are not traces of the fusion in Australian tribes of two or more primitive races. It has long seemed to me possible that the aborigines of Tasmania may have represented the autochthonous inhabitants of the Australian continent, who had thus escaped by isolation from annihilation or absorption—annihilation by being killed by a superior and better armed people, and absorption of women as war captives. I am aware that a similar suggestion has been made by one of our most enlightened and efficient investigators, the Rev. W. Mathews.

Questions also as to the origin of the Australian aborigines also suggest the possibility of the occasional arrival in the northern, north-western, or north-eastern coasts of small numbers of persons of other races by stress of weather. The occurrence of paintings of a remarkable character in caves in Western Australia have been long a subject of discussion, but it seems now that the true explanation of their origin may be that given by Mr. Mathews at the late meeting of the Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science, and that the Australian aborigines are not to be held as being their authors.

The study of the Australian languages also requires immediate attention, not merely by the compilation of vocabularies or the partial study of some language by constructing a grammar. What is required, is the systematic study of one or more languages, by some thoroughly competent philologist, who not only possesses the necessary scientific qualifications, but who also has a thorough colloquial acquaintance with the language. Such a combination it will be most difficult to meet with, but no difficulties should be deterrent where such important results in a linguistic sense are to be obtained. The comparative study of the Australian languages, or rather dialects, for they are all certainly of one stock, should certainly throw some light upon the development of languages, although even, with so primitive a people as the Australian aborigines, we must be immeasurably distant from any indications of the origin of language itself.

There is still also a great field for enquiry into the folk lore of the tribes. I have found that the tales and fables told by the old people, in some cases clearly throw a light upon the past history of the tribe, or upon some part or other of its organisation which has died out.

The Deluge legends of the tribes of the south-east coast, point to the occurrence during their occupancy, of some of the oscillations of level, the results of which are patent to the geological observer.

It may even be, that the study of the folk lore may illumine the most obscure but most interesting subject—the origin of totems.

Numerous other subjects await further enquiry. For instance, the alleged or assumed powers of the native wizards or doctors, the knowledge of, and the practice by them of hypnotism, the secret ceremonies of initiation, the use of the gesture language, the knowledge of medical herbs and other remedies and practice of simple surgery, are all subjects which will bear further and exhaustive enquiry. A study of the songs of these aborigines would also prove a valuable contribution to the science of music, for comparison with the musical efforts of other early peoples. A study of the various implements and weapons used by Australian tribes would, I am confident, lead to interesting results bearing upon the development of appliances useful to man. For the Australian aborigines differ much among themselves in the perfection to which they have brought their imple-

ments, weapons, or the methods employed for catching game. I may point to the comparatively rude spears in some tribes, as contrasted with the highly-finished chalcedony spear points from North-western Australia.

I may here note in this connection, that materials for an exhaustive work on Australian stone implements, are being collected by Mr. R. Etheridge, jun., of Sydney.

In all the enquiries to which I have referred, the members of this section can aid either personally, where it is still possible to make enquiries from the aborigines, or by interesting persons living in other parts of Australia, where the aborigines are still numerous. Much most valuable information has been lost for ever, through the extinction of native tribes. The aborigines in all parts of Australia where settlement is in progress, are more or less rapidly dying out, and even where this is least apparent, the contact of the white man destroys the primitive structure of their society, and modifies their beliefs. Indeed, in all parts of Australia the native race is doomed to destruction sooner or later; contact with the white race is fatal; the aborigines lose the original savage virtue, and acquire instead our vices which destroy them.

It behoves us, therefore, as representing Anthropological science in Australia, to set earnestly to work to record all that can yet be learned as to the customs and beliefs, the arts of peace and war, of probably the most primitive race now existing of mankind.
